CLAIM: Quitting smoking reduces the risk of heart disease.

RESPONSE:

-- Risk factor intervention trials are specifically designed to determine whether decreases in the levels of risk factors, including smoking, reduce the risk of heart disease. Despite massive and costly research efforts, intervention trials have failed to establish that decreases in risk factors lead to reductions in the risk of dying from heart disease.[1] This was a central point in an important review of CHD intervention trials by two researchers at the University of Dublin, who characterized the literature as providing a "considerable body of evidence which shows no benefits for intervention."[2]

-- Claims that quitting smoking reduces the risk for this disease are often based on comparisons of the CHD rates of smokers and exsmokers. Such comparisons would be valid, however, only if it were assumed that these groups were equivalent except for whether they continued to smoke or quit. This assumption is false, as exsmokers reportedly differ from smokers in numerous ways. In fact, they tend to be more like nonsmokers even before they quit smoking.[3]

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Thus, if exsmokers have lower heart disease rates, it may be because of the sorts of people they are, not simply because they quit smoking.[4]

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